

Comprehensive Examination in International Relations
June 1, 2015

Instructions

This examination is designed to test your knowledge of, and ability to synthesize, the complete field of international relations. The best answers will demonstrate a broad understanding of the literature on international relations. They also will respond directly to the questions – mere literature reviews will not do – and will deploy both analytical rigor and relevant evidence in support of their arguments. Theoretical or empirical overlap among answers will diminish their overall quality; avoid answering two or three questions for which your answers would be redundant. Gratuitous citations of UVA faculty will not help your grade. Please note that the examination is “closed-book” – i.e., any use of notes, books, computer files, or internet sources constitutes an Honor violation.

- **IR majors** should answer one question from each of the three parts of the exam, and will have six hours to complete the exam.
- **IR minors** should answer one question from Part I and one from *either* Part II or Part III, and will have four hours to complete the exam.

You may either type your answers or write them by hand. If you choose the latter, make a clear photocopy and give Bonnie Bragg the original at the end of the allotted time. Then type up your answers word-for-word from the handwritten version (correcting spelling and minor grammatical errors) and hand in the typed version within twenty-four hours. Include a signed pledge that the typed version is identical to the handwritten version.

Section I: Theories of International Relations

1. “The age of territorial expansion is largely over. States can count on their own survival without worrying that they will be conquered or carved up. As a result, economic interests dominate security concerns in modern international politics.” Do you agree or disagree? Explain.
2. “The security dilemma – with its spiraling levels of military and economic hostility, driven by uncertainty and fear – is the single most important underlying reason for conflict between states in the modern era. It is a tragic reality that cannot be escaped, only at best occasionally moderated.” Discuss.
3. According to one prominent IR scholar, the field of international studies has undermined its own progress by organizing itself into “academic ‘sects’ that engage in self-affirming research and then wage theological debates between academic religions.” Do you agree or disagree? Explain.
4. “The rationalist moment in international relations theory is over. Rationalist models offer a useful starting point for analysis, but to the extent that we value empirically-based research in international relations, the rational-choice framework is not particularly insightful.” Do you agree or disagree? Explain.
5. Is polarity still relevant in international politics? Be sure to reference to leading systemic theories in your answer.
6. Does traditional international relations theory inform or hinder empirically-driven social science research? Justify your answer in the context of at least three large research questions in IR.

Section II: Applications to Issues

1. Recent literature has found that the initiation and termination of war, the use of economic sanctions, financial crises, and humanitarian interventions all influence the tenure of political leaders. Is the academic study of leaders a progressive research program? Why or why not?
2. “The world today is undergoing a power transition just like the one before World War I. Just as the United States and Germany once sought to replace Britain, China now seeks to overtake the United States. World war is a certainty: the status quo power will never concede enough to satisfy the rising power.” Discuss.
3. Some recent literature on globalization suggests that international capital mobility is a structural constraint on domestic politics. Other literature argues that capital mobility actually empowers domestic political actors. In what ways is this debate similar to discussions about dependency and modernization in earlier decades? Does international capital mobility constrain national policy making?

4. What are the implications of transnational religious fundamentalism for theories of international relations? What theoretical approach offers the best way to understand this phenomenon?
5. “The democratic peace is an illusion. If peace has existed among democracies it has been because of deterrence or interstate commerce, not the features of democratic governments.” Discuss.
6. Has the advent of nuclear weapons fundamentally changed the nature of international politics?

Section III: Regional and Area Foreign Policies

1. Which of Waltz’s “three images” best helps us understand why Iran signed a deal constraining its nuclear program?
2. The sovereign debt crisis in Europe has resulted in bailouts for five countries, largely financed by Germany. Why has Germany been willing to participate in a massive transfer of capital to countries that it had previously viewed as fiscally-irresponsible members of the European Union?
3. What are the implications of the Trans-Pacific Partnership for U.S. security interests in East Asia?
4. To what extent does variation in regime type – as opposed to material power or ideology – explain national foreign policies in one of the following regions? (Choose only one.)
 - East Asia
 - East Europe and Russia
 - Latin America
 - Middle East and North Africa
 - South Asia
 - Sub-Saharan Africa
 - Western Europe